

Decolonial options and artistic/aestheSic entanglements:ⁱ An interview with Walter Mignolo

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Abstract

Since the 1990s Walter Mignolo has been a central figure in discussions and debates around the world about coloniality and the development of thinking within the frame of the “decolonial option.” Most recently, Mignolo has been deeply engaged in discussions with artists, curators, critics, theoreticians, and other cultural producers committed to the decolonial option with whom he has developed decolonial understandings of and approaches to “aestheTics” and “aestheSis.” In this interview with *Decolonization* editorial board member Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Mignolo discusses decolonial options and their entanglements within contemporary political and cultural processes, arguing that “decolonial thinkers and doers have to work in the entanglement and differential of power.” He elaborates on the range of options available to artists committed to decolonial work, as they navigate contemporary art worlds shaped by competing norms and based on diverging epistemologies and conceptions of creation and sensory experience. He talks about the role of Indigenous conceptions of and approaches to creative work, suggesting that Indigenous practices have a central role to play in how we come to deal with the colonial wound through decolonial healing.

Keywords: *decolonial aesthesis; decolonial aesthetics; coloniality/modernity*

Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández: To set the stage and introduce your thinking to our readers, I would like to start by asking you about decolonization and decoloniality. You speak in your work of decolonization, and more recently of decoloniality, as an “option,” among other (equally valid) options. First, could you elaborate on this shift away from decolonization, and what you mean by describing decolonial thinking as an option, as opposed to a need, or an imperative?

Walter Mignolo: Thanks Rubén, for framing the interview in this way.

Although “decolonization” is a concept that has currency, the difference you perceive is between the meaning of “decolonization” during the Cold War (e.g., the struggle for decolonization in Asia and Africa) and the meaning of decoloniality today. During the Cold War, decolonization referred to Indigenous struggles to expel the colonizer from their territory and build their own nation-state. It became also a project of states that gained independence. The Bandung Conference of 1955 was that moment when modern/colonial nation-state building was in process. India and Indonesia were already liberated, but Algeria and Nigeria, for example, attained independence after the Bandung Conference, in 1962 and 1960 respectively.

However, in the Caribbean (mainly in the French and British Caribbean) the term was used as an aspiration for independence. Jamaica, for example, slowly gained independence in 1962, not through armed struggle but through negotiation. Around 1990, the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano introduced the concept of “coloniality.”ⁱⁱ Coloniality was distinguished from colonialism. Colonialism refers mainly to historical moments in the history of the modern/colonial world (Western formation and domination since 1500). Imperialism doesn’t need colonialism. Colonialism is one of the visible faces of coloniality. There is coloniality without colonialism; for example, China or Japan or Russia. These formations were never colonized but did not escape coloniality. Today it is said that colonialism is over, an episode of the past, but coloniality is well and alive.

And I would say more, that the “global crisis” we are witnessing is due in large part to the dispute for the control of coloniality (short hand for ‘colonial matrix of power’). What happened, and is still going on at the moment of writing these lines, in Ukraine/Crimea is a paradigmatic example of such a dispute. Western Atlantic imperial states that created and managed the colonial matrix of power (coloniality) can no longer control it. BRICS and MINTⁱⁱⁱ states are disputing its control; that means that they are delinking from Western institutions (IMF, World Bank, EU Central Bank) and not receiving orders. Vladimir Putin’s advance into Crimea is part of the paradigmatic example I just mentioned.

As for “decolonial option,” “option” is distinguished from “mission.” There were the Christian mission, the civilizing mission, and the development and modernizing missions. Liberalism,

Marxism, Islamism are characterized by their will to convert and the will to truth. They are also built on the assumption of “truth” without parenthesis; that is, built on abstract universalisms. By defining decolonial as an option, two major steps are taken. First, when you state that the decolonial is an option, every thing is an option – Christianity is an option, Liberalism and Neo-Liberalism are options, Marxism is an option, Islamism is an option. We live in a world of options and, therefore, in a world of “truths” in parenthesis. Missions and truth without parenthesis are necessarily totalitarian, which shall not be confused with totalitarianism. A totalitarian mission could be predicated in the name of peace and democracy for example, as far as it is possible. Totalitarian missions may or may not fall into totalitarianism. Without the BRICS and three of the MINT countries, Westernization could have followed the path of totalitarianism; that is, advancing the project of “spreading democracy” in the rhetoric of George W. Bush. Now this is no longer possible: dewesternization and rewesternization will continue for the foreseeable future to negotiate their co-existence, not necessarily pacific, as we are seeing in Russia’s strategies in Crimea-Ukraine. Both of these options are being played in the sphere of inter-state relations. The decolonial option is *unthinkable* today in the sphere of the state. The decolonial is an option being enacted in the sphere of the emerging global political society; that is, the thousands and thousands of decolonial projects, of which the First Nations of Canada and this publication are one of many instances.^{iv}

RG-F: Can you comment on the relationship between your understanding of the decolonial option and other relevant concepts or processes, like identification and representation, land and Indigeneity, borders and diaspora, for example? How do these dynamics and processes shape when and how decolonization/decoloniality emerges as an option and how it is related (hierarchically, perhaps) to other options?

WM: Identification may or may not be tied up with decoloniality. For identification to be framed decolonially it would necessarily have to be articulated clearly in relation to coloniality. If, for example, coloniality describes the hidden process of erasure, devaluation, and disavowing of certain human beings, ways of thinking, ways of living, and of doing in the world – that is, coloniality as a process of inventing identifications – then for identification to be decolonial it needs to be articulated as “des-identification” and “re-identification,” which means it is a process of delinking. As for “representation,” it is a word that doesn’t exist in my vocabulary. When I talk about “representation,” it is not my word, but like in this case, someone else’s word. “Representation” is a keyword in the rhetoric of modernity, that is, in Western mainstream epistemology. In this regard, thinking decolonially (that is, thinking within the frame of the decolonial option) means to start from “enunciation” and not from “representation.” When you start from the enunciation and think decolonially, you shall run away from representation, for representation presupposes that there is a world out there that someone is representing. This is a basic assumption of modern epistemology. There is not a world that is represented, but a world that is constantly invented in the enunciation. The enunciation is constituted by certain actors,

languages, and categories of thoughts, beliefs, and sensing. The enunciation, furthermore, is never or only enacted to “represent” the world, but to confront or support previous existing enunciations. That is, enunciation is enacted and framed in other options (e.g., could be disciplines, could be systems of ideas like liberalism or Marxism, could be artistic conventions, etc.).

Indigeneity and land is another complex issue. From the very beginning of European invasion to the “New World” and the invention of international law to appropriate and expropriate land, the relations between land and Indigeneity have been a point of contention between the European rhetoric of salvation to dispose (coloniality) and the determination of Indigenous peoples from Abya Yala to endure the invasion and its consequences. European colonizers had a different conception of land, which they saw in economic terms. Indigenous peoples from Abya Yala connect land with life and spirituality. In my view then, Indigeneity and Land/Spirituality have been and continue to be strong pillars of ongoing decolonizing processes. It is, in other words, the decolonial option at work, confronting Western imperial/colonial options advanced by Christian missionaries, merchants and plantation owners, civilizers and developers.

Borders and diaspora may or may not be framed decolonially. Now in Europe, the concept of “borders” is fashionable. In general, borders became an object of study, as scholars who do not dwell in the border “study” borders from their disciplinary perspectives. Decolonially, however, borders matter when the enunciation is enacted in the border, by enunciators dwelling in the border. I have elaborated on this idea thanks to Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*.^v Decolonial thinking presupposes border epistemology, and border epistemology (which cannot be disciplinary, but un-disciplinary) presupposes to dwell in the border. Border epistemology emerges from the senses, from the body sensing the power differential of the border (any border, geo-political and body-political). Thus, border epistemology and decolonial thinking are two sides of the same coin, but “borders” as an object of disciplinary study is not related to decoloniality.

The same could be said about “diaspora.” “Diaspora” could be, like border, an object of anthropological, sociological, economic, or political analysis. “Diaspora” becomes decolonial when the enunciation itself is diasporic (and not disciplinary), an enunciation that frames diaspora in the history of coloniality. That is, diaspora framed in the history of coloniality is not the same as diaspora framed in economic, religious or political history. I could say that when “diaspora” is articulated in a “diasporic epistemology” (which is another manifestation of “border epistemology”), then diaspora engages the decolonial option (instead of, for example, disciplinary options).

To sum up: border and diaspora could be articulated in several universes of meaning, that is, in several options. No option has property rights over any given term. Border and diaspora could be

objects of sociological, economic, political or artistic research (disciplinary options), or they could be key concepts of decolonial thinking. When this happens, border and diaspora are no longer objects of study, but are in-corporated in the enunciation. They become consciousness: border consciousness, diaspora consciousness and, let me add a related one, in-migrant consciousness. In-migrant consciousness overlaps with diaspora, but they are not the same.^{vi} Diaspora underlines the dispersion from a point of departure; in-migrant underscores the life situation in a foreign country.

RG-F: You also speak about a decolonial method, and in your recent work with your colleagues in the Transnational Decolonial Institute^{vii} you have written about a decolonial aesthetic and more recently of a decolonial aestheSis. Could you describe in general terms what is this decolonial aestheSis? Specifically, could you share some of your ideas about what characterizes the work of decolonial aestheSis? What does such work seek to do, and how does it do that work through forms of cultural production? How does it both rely on and depart from colonial ideas about “the arts” and the modernist/colonial work of aesthetics?

WM: Complex set of questions. I addressed these issues in the special issue of *Social Text Periscope*, “Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds, Decolonial Healings,” so I refer interested readers to the introduction to the dossier.^{viii}

Basically, the points are the following:

The word and the concept of aesthetics entered the vocabulary of modern, European philosophy, in the eighteenth century. German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten published in 1750 a treatise titled *Aesthetics*. The concept was derived from the Greek word *aesthesis*, a word that refers to the senses and the emotions derived from the senses. Baumgarten was highlighting the importance of the senses in knowing and understanding. He was doing so in the middle of enthusiastic debates about the primacy and superiority of *secular reason*, the concept that displaced *theological reason* and allowed for the foundation of secular philosophy and secular science.

Then came Immanuel Kant, who took up the word, and from there he founded Aesthetics as a branch of philosophy. Philosophical Aesthetics displaced Poetics, which was the overall concept that, since Aristotle, framed *poetry* and that, in the eighteenth century, became *literature*. Philosophical Aesthetics becomes the theory of the beautiful and the sublime, and the theory of artistic genius. *Art* (from Latin *ars*), which means simply skill, derived from *poiesis*, which in Greek meant *to make*, becomes coupled with aesthetics: the skill of the genius to make artistic objects embracing beauty. That legacy has been transmitted to current discussions on postmodern aesthetics (Rancière) and altermodern art (Bourriaud). Notice that Rancière’s most

recent book is titled *Aiesthesia*^{ix}; that is, sensing. But the sensing he explores is the sensing of the Western experience. His examples never cross the Mediterranean toward the South of Italy, neither does he go toward the East of Greece, and never to the north of Germany. That sensibility is not universal, it is European.

We, decolonial thinkers (artists, curators, activists, art and literary critics, philosophers), have to delink from that legacy, the legacy of modern aesthetics and its Greek and Roman legacies (*ars*). So the first step was to review and remake the legacies I just mentioned. And one caveat: for reasons that are long to explain, it is necessary to start from concepts introduced by Western philosophy, science, religion, arts, and knowledge in general in order to depart (to delink) from them. This is for two reasons: one is that Western knowledge has been spread globally and, therefore, it is in all of us who went through at least secondary education. It is irrelevant for billions of people who have not been exposed to such education. However, people who have not been exposed to secondary education and above have senses, sensibilities, emotions, and they have skills to make things that bring them and the community pleasure or emotions in sacred rituals. So that *aesthesia* is not restricted to the art world, but is a basic human attribute (and I will go further, all living organisms, human or not).

Within the global dimension of the senses, for all living organisms and for every *living human body*, there is one dimension that is of interest for decolonial thinkers and doers (as mentioned before): the sense-experiences that Frantz Fanon identified as *sociogenesis*: I am who I am because of the gaze of the other, and that other, is a White other.^x *Sociogenesis* is a decolonial concept that evidences the colonial wound; the type of experience Fanon is describing in the experience of the racialized subject, the wounded subject, because racialization is always a classification and a ranking, and that classification is not embedded in “nature” but is man-made. And the wounded subject is not necessarily the poor or the subaltern, but it could be you or me. The colonial wound cuts across social classes, and it is both racial and patriarchal.

Decolonial aestheSis refers in general to any and every thinking and doing that is geared toward undoing a particular kind of aestheSis, of senses, that is the sensibility of the colonized subject. What decolonial artists want is not to create beautiful objects, installations, music, multimedia or whatever the possibilities are, but to create in order to decolonize sensibilities, to transform colonial aestheTics into decolonial aestheSis. In that regard, aestheTics is the image that reflects in the mirror of imperial/colonial aesthetics in the Kantian tradition. Once you delink, you begin to create a world in which decolonial aestheSis has delinked from aesthetics, which has become aestheTics.

RG-F: In your essay on decolonial aestheSis with Roland Vázquez you distinguish between “two currents,” one which you call simply “aestheSis” – related to popular culture and popular arts, and “everyday aesthetic practices and the senses” – and one which you call

“decolonial aestheSis,” which you describe as a “critical intervention within the world of the contemporary arts” and which centers the work of those who can invoke the title of “artists.” However, would the label “artist” (along with the individualism it implies) limit the possibilities of a decolonial option by, as with the “Altermodern” aesthetic, inoculating individual cultural producers? In short, how does the work of decolonial aestheSis hold those who embrace the label “artists” accountable for decolonization? Can there be “artists” without colonization?

WM: We, all of us in the world who have been educated at least at the level of secondary school, are trapped in the Western epistemic and hermeneutical vocabulary. That is not tragic. It is necessary to introduce new concepts, like Fanon’s sociogenesis. But it is necessary also to work with existing ones in order to de-naturalize them or, if you wish, to decolonize them. Once you accept this fact, you work from given concepts and look behind and under them. You work by analectic negation. That is, not the dialect negation of thesis, antithesis, synthesis, but the geo- and body-political negation.^{xi} The analectic negation comes from memories, sensibilities, skills, knowledge, that were “there” before the imperial contact with European education. Once European education intervened, whatever creation and conceptualization of creativity was there became trapped in the category of, for example, art and folklore. The analectic negation tells you first that art and folklore are two Western concepts, not two differentiated ontologies. Once you accept this, you can use the label philosopher or artist for an Aymara *amauta*; or you can call *amauta* a Western philosopher or artists. Such thinking doesn’t need permission of the IEF (International Epistemic Fund); creativity doesn’t need to get in debt with the IAF (International Artistic Fund).

RG-F: It is interesting to observe that those of us who have been deeply entrenched in Western/European epistemic and hermeneutical vocabulary are to some extent stuck with a certain language that we must contend with, as you say, through analectic negation; that is, by looking outside the parameters or the confines of the Hegelian dialectic toward what is beyond a colonial (European) notion of universality. But to that extent, the overlap between the label of philosopher or artist – two starkly Eurocentric concepts, and the role of the *amauta* in Aymara might have severe limitations, particularly for a project of decolonial delinking. Can concepts like “philosopher” and/or “artist” ever be completely decolonized? How do we handle the debris or the colonial sediments that remain and that percolate when we utter those words within decolonial projects, particularly when they accentuate a particular individuality or a conception of creativity that is antithetical to Indigenous conceptions of knowing and making? In other words, what do you see as the limits and opportunities that the focus on “artists” and “art works” either opens or imposes on the “decolonial option”?

WM: For me, “Rule 1” of decolonial methodology (that is, the way, how one proceeds, what are the rules of the game) is two fold. On the one hand, to work the entanglement between co-existing concepts, such as “philosopher” and “amauta.” Both words name a social role and a type of activity that have “thinking” in common. So, from the decolonial perspective, they are co-existing concepts in different languages, social organizations, social visions, etc. On the other hand, however, since 1500, “philosopher” became the point of reference to make sense of “amauta” (and is as such that Garcilaso de la Vega translates it). The entanglement takes place in a power differential: philosopher is universal, amauta local from the perspective of the rhetoric of modernity. That rhetoric creates the power differential and makes of amauta a lesser social role. That is how the colonial difference is created and, in this case, the colonial epistemic and ontological difference. Amauta is ontologically and epistemologically inferior to philosopher.

“Rule 2” is that at this point it is difficult to think and engage in decolonial undertakings without accepting that the “conversation” has been established within Western epistemology. That means, with foundations in Greek and Latin languages and in translation to the six modern imperial European languages: Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese (Renaissance); German, English, and French (Enlightenment). Like it or not, it is necessary to accept that. The question is how to work around it decolonially.

First, you start from etymology; what does “art” mean? It means “skill.” It was a translation from the Greek “poiesis” to the Latin “ars.” So a shoemaker and a carpenter are artists and poets, in the sense that they are “makers.” The question is, when does “poiesis” become “poetics” and “art” become “artistic” (e.g., artistic work of art)? Aristotle told us how poiesis becomes poetics by laying out the goals and the rules of comedy and tragedy. Poiesis needs a particular executioner, the poet that is able to, instead of making a shoe or building a house, “make” a narrative that captures the senses and emotions of a lot of people. That is, some one who is able to, through “mimesis,” construct a narrative that is delivered to an audience.

Now, the language is particular to Greece, but story telling in many forms is common to every human community, particularly human communities that attained a sophisticated stage of communal organization that, in Western vocabulary, is named as “civilization.” Therefore, the fact that Greek and Latin vocabularies became “universal” was due to the historical foundation of Western Civilization since the sixteenth century, its global political and economic expansion, and the expansion of its vocabulary: the rhetoric of modernity created and expanded such vocabulary.^{xii} Consequently, we are all now in the Western epistemic trap; we have to deal with a vocabulary that is local and that became global. This was one of my theses in *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*.^{xiii}

Border epistemology is inscribed in that operation through which the local foundations of a Western vocabulary that has become global are unveiled, its ground uncovered, and it is placed

next to vocabulary from other local languages that name and describe the same kind of phenomena. Take for example Leanne Simpson's *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*.^{xiv} Starting from an affirmation - such as, for us, the Nishnabegs, theory is story telling - Simpson patiently decolonizes Western vocabulary and asserts Nishnabeg. Now, in order to do so, it is necessary, to work the entanglement between both and be aware of the colonial differentials. These are two basic rules to feel comfortable in a task that requires patience, philology, and the vision provided by the decolonial option.

Certainly, I cannot perform this operation each time that I write "poet, philosopher, theory, democracy," etc. But once you know the rules of the game, you just know that in the vocabulary of the decolonial option, "poet, philosopher, theory, democracy," etc. do not mean what they mean in the vocabulary of the rhetoric of modernity. That is why the decolonial is an option and Western epistemology another option that happens to be hegemonic or dominant, depending on the locals.

RG-F: Given the history of what Howard Becker succinctly labeled the "Art Worlds"^{xv} and their relationship to modernity/colonization, to what extent do the "art worlds" of modernity/coloniality absorb or diffuse the impact of the decolonial move?

WM: I have written and lectured based on these four current points on the "art world":

1) Art and the market. Aesthetics values are replaced by market values. Art is an investment, like gold or other value-object, land and property. The international art fairs in mega cities are just that;

2) A second trajectory is around postmodern and altermodern aesthetics. These are the biennials and triennials that act as guardians and promoters of values, either in the wide umbrella of "contemporary art" and modern/postmodern aesthetics, or altermodern aesthetics.

3) The third trajectory is what I described as "dewesternization." Dewesternization is supported by considerable amount of money and museums; for example, the Sharjah Biennial 11, the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, and the Asian Civilization Museum in Singapore. Supported by the economic and financial growth of the Gulf and South East Asia, dewesternization is projects oriented toward the affirmation of identities that Western Civilization taught them to despise. I have written about this for the readers interested in learning more about it.^{xvi}

4) The fourth trajectory of the "art world" is decolonial aestheSis. This trajectory began to be formulated in Quito, Ecuador, in the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in 2009 and had its first public event in Bogotá, Colombia, in November 2010. There is a description of the process in the article in *Social Text* quoted earlier. The bottom line is that decolonial aestheSis is a

philosophical exploration and argumentation that runs parallel to artistic creativity in dialogue with decolonial aestheSis. Artists also write about it, as the reader can see, again, in the special issue of *Social Text*. Thus decolonial art and decolonial aestheSis go hand in hand, parallel to, for example, modern or postmodern or altermodern art and aesthetics. Remember, by “art” I refer to the skill to create something with words, sounds, colors, digital media, moving images, whatever, and by “aesthetics” I mean the philosophy that made sense of certain creative activities (e.g. art). The Eurocentric organization of knowledge was to divide between truth, beauty, and good (that is, epistemology, aesthetics and ethics). Now we have to delink from that particular prison house of language. And we are doing it. “We” the many, all of us who are aware and working in this general direction based on our own geo-corpo cultural and material conditions.

RG-F: It is helpful to consider these four trajectories of the “art world,” particularly as they overlap and influence each other. Clearly this is the case with the first three, which are not only squarely grounded within a particular conception of “the arts,” but also with capitalism and, more recently, with neoliberalism (particularly through the appeals to the logic of the creative economy that is often used to support contemporary manifestations of all three trajectories). But how can the fourth trajectory of decolonial aestheSis succeed without fully delinking, not only from the “prison house of language” (and that might include words like “arts” and “artists,” as I have argued^{xvii}), but from the very institutional forms that give ideological substance to this trajectory as a move of the “art world”? What is this “we” outside of ideology or cultural and material conditions?

WM: It depends on the meaning attributed to “succeed.” I have invited four decolonial artists to one of my graduate seminars, one in person the others via Skype. The graduate seminar was on decolonial aesthetics. I have one question to all of them: what is a decolonial artist/curator (for some of them are also curators)? Perhaps the most explicit answer can be found in Pedro Lasch’s article in the special issue of *Social Text-Periscope*.^{xviii} The point is that none of their aims is “success,” but “decolonization.” So, then, one thing is to “succeed” in the art world and the other to *use* the art world in decolonial projects. Granted, you may *use* museums, like Pedro Lasch’s *Black Mirror/Espejo Negro*, or you can use the *Ballhaus Naunynstrasse* in Berlin, as Alanna Lockward has done in the last three Be.Bop 2012, 2013, 2014, around the topic “Black Europe Body Politics.” “Success” here means to delink from the first three trajectories, and be “successful” in the contribution artists and curators can make to build decolonial sensibilities, decolonial subjects or, still, help colonial subjects to re-emerge, re-surge, and re-exist, as Leanne Simpson has argued. Success here is not to make it, to beg to be recognized and to belong to one of the three trajectories. Delinking means precisely that we (decolonial artists, curators, activists, theoretician) are not expecting recognition from the three first trajectories but, again, to delink from them. That is what delinking means. If we (artists, theoreticians, curators, etc.) succeed, it is because we delinked, not because we have been recognized and “accepted” in a house we are not interested in inhabiting.

So here there are entangled relations with the “art world” in the first three trajectories. It is in a way similar to the question of “philosophy” and “amauta.” Benvenuto Chavajay, a Guatemalan-Maya (he says Mayo, for his community has problems pronouncing the “a” since colonial times and alphabetization), defines himself as “artista.” The historical alphabetical difficulty serves him well to detach and delink from the grand narrative of the art world. Sure, he participates in the 2014 Guatemalan Biennial of Art, which doesn’t mean that he surrenders to the “world of art.” Rather he is *using* the “world of art” to make a decolonial statement. This is very clear about what he does, what he makes, as well as in the statements, narratives, and reflections on what he makes. One again, delinking doesn’t mean to go to the mountains and make sculptures that no one sees. The decolonial option is an option that enters the debate among other options and, as such, decolonial thinkers and doers have to work in the entanglement and differential of power - thus, border epistemology and decolonial thinking and doing.

I can go on and on with cases that make this point. The bottom line is that decolonial aesthetics/AestheSis enacted by “artistos,” curators, theoreticians, activists, etc., is always in and out. The “art world” is something that is there, an option, but decolonial aesthetics is an-other option, aware of the co-existence and aware of the hegemonic/dominant profile of the “art world.”

RG-F: At the end of the essay quoted above, you state: “Decolonial aestheSis departs from an embodied consciousness of the colonial wound and moves toward healing.” The notion of healing has also been quite important among Indigenous scholars throughout the Abya-Yala. What is the particular role, if any, of Indigenous practices and cultural producers in the project of decolonial aestheSis?

WM: Yes indeed, Rubén, the notion of “healing” is taken from Indigenous thinkers, doers, leaders as well as from African and Afro-Caribbean knowing and doing; knowledges, understandings, and communal health activities that are not based in Greco-Roman legacies. One of the forms of “method” (the way) of delinking is precisely to think and become by embodying categories of thoughts that are grounded in non-Western experiences. Border thinking and doing (artistic creativity as well as any other forms where thinking is manifested) is precisely the decolonial method. This is a way of understanding what Linda T. Smith is telling us by arguing for a “decolonizing methodology,”^{xxix} and what Leanne Simpson is telling us by saying that, among the Nishnaabeg, theory comes in the form of story telling.^{xx}

What is the colonial wound you have to heal from? These are all the wounds infringed by patriarchy and racism, in all walks of life. Patriarchy and racism are two pillars of Eurocentric knowing, sensing, and believing. These pillars sustain a structure of knowledge – Christian theology, secular philosophy (including aesthetics) and secular sciences. This structure is

embedded and embodied in actors, institutions, languages that regulate and manage the world. It operates through making people feel inferior. When that happens, the decolonial wound is opened. Healing is the process of delinking, or regaining your pride, your dignity, assuming your entire humanity in front of an un-human being that makes you believe you were abnormal, lesser, that you lack something. How do you heal that? Through knowing, understanding, decolonial artistic creativity and decolonial philosophical aestheSis, and above all by building the communal (not the Marxist commune, neither the liberal common good, but the communal; the legacies of “communities” beyond Eurocentric legacies of Christian and secular family and “society”).

Once you take this step, even if you have not acquired these knowledges and understandings as a member of an Indigenous or Afro-Caribbean culture, or any other non-Western culture and civilization, if you are of European descent and mixed blood, once you realize that you have also been colonized, that your mind, your body, your senses, your sight, your hearing have been modeled by the colonial matrix of power, that is, by its institutions, languages, music, art, literature, etc. - or what is the same as Western Civilization - you begin to “heal.” The process of healing is that of becoming a decolonial subject, or “learning to be.” This was one of the goals of education at the *Universidad Intercultural de las Naciones y Pueblos Indígenas Amawtay Wasi*,^{xxi} in Ecuador.

It may help to understand the meaning of “decolonial healing” by juxtaposing it with the “psychoanalytic cure.” The analyst and the analysand are in dialogue within a power differential. Psychoanalysis is the disciplinary version (e.g., the psychoanalyst has to have a diploma) of the relationship between healers and persons in what is called popular culture. However, the psychoanalytic cure tends to help the analysand to come to terms with the psychological disturbance of modern society and be integrated into it. On the other hand, the healer function is not to integrate the person to the urban middle class (have you seen psychoanalysts in the country side?), but to help the person to survive in their marginalized communities, which are not the urban middle class. Decolonial healing takes from the popular healer, rather than from the psychoanalytic cure. Different from both, there is not one singular person who is “the decolonial healer,” because decolonial healing is a communal enterprise as, again, Leanne Simpson argues consistently through her magnificent book, *Dancing on Our Turtles’ Back*. For those of us who are not Indigenous, but of European descent, there is much more to learn from Indigenous decolonial healing in América^{xxii} than from “Indigenous” and/or “native” European psychoanalysis.^{xxiii}

RG-F: That may very well be the case, but it returns us to the original question regarding decolonization and what you frame as a decolonial option. In a sense, the actual process of decolonization is still very much ongoing within the context of the Abya-Yala, and it is not so much an option, but an imperative for Indigenous people (and here I mean Indigenous

in reference to groups that are actively being pushed out of their land, literally eliminated through what Veracini describes as various modes of “transfer”^{xxiv}). In a sense, only settlers of European descent have the privilege of “choosing” a decolonial option, and that very act of choosing positions them hierarchically above those who have no choice, since their only alternative is to embrace extinction. That seems like very precarious terms for engaging in a healing process of any kind. What is the role of sensing and creating in this context, and is it possible that terms like “artist” and “the arts” may be irrelevant, or worse, counterproductive to such a process? What is the alternative?

WM: This is a complex question that needs some detailed unpacking. I shall begin to note with you that I am not an Indigenous thinker, scholar, activist or artist. And of course I do not intend to “represent” Indigenous people, or what Indigenous people want or say in their projects of resurging and re-emerging. So then, whether the “decolonial option” is meaningful to Indigenous projects is not for me or for you to say, since Guaman Poma de Ayala, Taki Onkoy, Tupak Katari, and the Zapatistas, to name a few, Indigenous communities have been able, under terrible conditions, to re-exist creatively for five hundred years. What is currently happening is a robust re-surgence, in Leanne Simpson’s words, as well as others (in Argentina and Chile for example), and re-existence. From Indigenous memories several decolonizing projects are being articulated. It is up to them to say if the decolonial option is meaningful or helpful for them. What is clear is that they have their own decolonial projects.

A second point to unpack is that, as noted earlier, the word and concept of “decolonization” was linked to the struggles for liberation in Asia and Africa since 1945, more or less. When Sukarno organized the Bandung Conference in 1955, he made clear that this was the first international conference of people of color in the world. Indigenous communities and leaders, in the entire Hemisphere, were of course not oblivious to what was going on in Africa and Asia.

When Anibal Quijano introduced the concept of “coloniality” in the early 90s’ and recast decoloniality in terms of processes of delinking from coloniality, or the colonial matrix of power, it was certainly within a Latin American debate (e.g., dependency theory) as well as the global frame provided by Immanuel Wallerstein under the umbrella of “modern world-system.” In the project of modernity-coloniality we modified the expression into “modern/colonial world system.” Thus the proposal emerged in Latin America; it was a creation of Third World intellectuals in Latin America that responded to the struggles in the entire Third World until the collapse of the Soviet Union. “Coloniality” was introduced precisely at the edge of the collapse of the Second World.

Your question is also interesting because recently a debate emerged among some of the members of the collective modernity/coloniality as to whether it is possible or preferable to link projects to ethnicities, gender, or geo-historical locations. Some would prefer not to, others would prefer to

do this. We agreed that decoloniality, as a connector of many decolonial projects, doesn't have a precise location. One point however shall be stressed: decoloniality is a concept that carries the experience of liberation struggles. It is not a concept born from the history, memories, and sensibilities of Western Europe.

I sympathize with you when you refer to the strenuous conditions Indigenous people all over the world have endured and are still enduring. On the other hand, we shall not underestimate their strength, their wisdom, and their endurance. As for whether decoloniality is the only option they have, I would tend to disagree. Indigenous people could opt to assimilate, to adapt, or to re-exist and re-emerge. It is this latest decision that would be the Indigenous decolonial project. The question here is not to see ourselves as saviours, but to know how to work together. Or, to put it in other words, the decolonial is an option, not a mission. An option open to all who would like to embrace it, and an option ready to work together with other decolonial projects, whether they consider decoloniality an option or not. I shall also say that, as Stuart Hall stated, there is no safe place and, therefore, the decolonial could be joined or embraced for purposes others than decoloniality. That is the moment in which the decolonial option, like any other option, has to deal with internal differences, which are very healthy. Otherwise the project becomes a dogma.

Decoloniality, as said above, is a connector of many projects around the world. Indigenous decolonial projects are one among several. The specific project identified as “modernity/coloniality” and today “modernity/coloniality/decoloniality”^{xxv} is not an Indigenous project, which doesn't mean that Indigenous thinkers and doers could not join and appropriate it for their own needs and causes, in the same way that non-Indigenous people could join decolonial projects lead by Indigenous leaders. I deal with this issue in an article on “identity IN politics.”^{xxvi} The problem is that the future, if the human species survives, is unthinkable in terms of one universal abstract that is good for everyone. Whomever holds such belief assumes truth without parenthesis and, therefore, war. That is why decoloniality is an option and promotes co-existence of non-imperial options; co-existence in decolonial love.^{xxvii}

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NOTES

ⁱ On “aestheSic,” see Walter D. Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez, “Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings,” in *Social Text-Periscope*, 2013, http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aestheSis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/. When we write “aestheTic” and “aestheSis” we indicate that this is the decolonial rendering of modern and postmodern “aesthetic” and “aesthesis” or “aesthesia.” See for example, Jacques Rancière, *Aesthesis: Scene from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, (London: Verso, 2013).

ⁱⁱ See Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepentla: Views From the South*, 1, no. 3, (2000): 533-580.

ⁱⁱⁱ The acronym BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) was suggested by Jim O’ Neil from Goldman and Sachs in 2001. MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey) was introduced by Fidelity Investments and then popularized by O’ Neil. Obviously, the mapping of “emerging economies” was done for financial purposes. Investors could have never imagined that the acronym would be “stolen” by BRICS countries to organize themselves as a political and economic “dewesternizing” force. Dewesternization is characterized by political delinking in a globally integrated economy. MINT is more complicated, for they are not unified and may not ever be. Mexico is following the steps of the US, that is, rewesternization. Mexico is also one of the four Latin American countries in the *Alianza del Pacífico* with Chile, Peru and Colombia, that is, all countries following the steps of the US. On the contrary, Turkey, Indonesia and Nigeria are following a politics of delinking from Western hegemony. Bottom line, while these acronyms identify emerging economies for investors, they serve also to identify growing economies and political delinking from Western hegemony in the changing world order.

^{iv} See for example: Idle No More (<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>; <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/14165-idle-no-more-from-grassroots-to-global-movement>); Parti des indigènes de la république (<http://indigenes-republique.fr/>); La via campesina (<http://viacampesina.org/en/>); Sovereignty of food (<http://foodsecurecanada.org/who-we-are/what-food-sovereignty>); and of course, the Zapatistas (<http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/>; <http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/lesson-in-organization-and-presence-from-the-zapatistas/>).

^v Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

^{vi} The hyphenated prefix in-migrant underscores the place where migrants establish themselves/ourselves and where they/we somehow remain in-migrant, even when we are also nationals. The hyphen profiles in-migrants: Afro-Canadians, Asian-Canadians, etc. Canadians without a hyphen are assumed to be “natives” of European descent, and people of European descent in América are the standard that defines the hyphen, as if Europeans in América were not also in-migrants. Western Europeans are indigenous to Europe, while Anglo-Americans (and I put the hyphen here to make visible that Anglos are one among many ethnic groups) are “natives,” in the sense that they were of European descent and “born in” (“criollos” in Spanish América) the French and British colonies, today Canada and the US, like French- and Anglo-Canadians.

^{vii} <http://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/>

^{viii} See Mignolo and Vázquez, “Decolonial AestheSis.”

^{ix} Rancière, *Aesthesis*

^x English translations of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin/White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) use the term “sociogeny.” Others like Lewis Gordon and Nelson Maldonado-Torres use the term “sogigenesis,” which is another rendering of sociogenic principle in the same way that ontogenesis and philogenesis are equivalents to ontogenic and philogenic principles. See also Sylvia Wynter, “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity,

the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to be ‘Black’” in Mercedes F. Durán-Cogan and Antonio Gómez-Morianna, eds., *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America* (New York: Routledge), 30-66.

^{xi} On “analectic negation” see Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985). Available at: <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/dussel/filolibin/filolibin.html>.

^{xii} This was one of my main theses and “methodology” in Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of The Renaissance. Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), from chapter 2 onward.

^{xiii} Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

^{xiv} Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, (Winnipeg, Manitoba: ARP Books, 2011).

^{xv} Howard Becker, *Art Worlds*, (San Francisco, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

^{xvi} See Walter D. Mignolo, “Enacting the Archives, Decentering the Muses: The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha and the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore” *Ibraaz*. Available at <http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/77>; “Re:Emerging, Decentering, and Delinking: Shifting the Geographies of Sensing, Believing and Knowing” *Ibraaz*. Available at <http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/59/>.

^{xvii} Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, “Why the Arts Don’t Do Anything: Toward a New Vision for Cultural Production in Education.” *Harvard Educational Review* 83, no. 1 (2013): 211-237.

^{xviii} Pedro Lasch, “Propositions for a Decolonial Aesthetics and ‘Five Decolonial Days in Kassel’ (Documenta 13 AND AND AND)” *Social Text* (2013). Available at : http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/propositions-for-a-decolonial-aesthetics-and-five-decolonial-days-in-kassel-documenta-13-and-and-and/

^{xix} Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (London: Zed Books Ltd. 1999).

^{xx} Simpson, *Dancing on our Turtle’s Back*.

^{xxi} The Intercultural University of Indigenous Nations and Peoples Amawtay Wasi (House of Knowledge), was an initiative of Indigenous leaders, scholars, activists and intellectuals. It was recently closed by President Rafael Correa after an evaluation of the University following the Corporate standards that Correa intends to implement in all national universities, including the new one created under his presidency. https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/Martha_Tabares_at_The_InterAmerican_Commission_on_Human_Rights_Save_The_Intercultural_University_of_Indigenous_Peoples_A/.

^{xxii} Notice that “América” co-exists and is used interchangeably with “Abya-Yala.” These are names given to places either by Europeans or by other *Pueblos Originarios* (original peoples). Abya-Yala, the name of the territory inhabited by Indigenous Kuna (today Panama) was recently adapted as the name of the continent by all *Pueblos Originarios* from Mapuches in Chile to First Nations in Canada. Both are legitimate terms. There is no reason for Abya-Yala to replace América and there is no reason for América to erase Abya-Yala.

^{xxiii} indigenous (adj.) 1640s, from Late Latin *indigenus* “born in a country, native,” from Latin *indigena* “sprung from the land,” as a noun, “a native,” literally “in-born,” or “born in (a place),” from Old Latin *indu* “in, within” (earlier *endo*) + **gene-*, root of *gignere* (perf. *genui*) “beget,” from PIE **gen-* “produce” (see *genus*); from Online

Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=indigenous&allowed_in_frame=0. Indigenous and natives are relative to local histories. Europeans living in Europe are as indigenous as any body else in the planet, and they are also “natives,” born from parents who were indigenous to other lands. The idea that indigenous people are only none-Europeans only reinforces the superiority of Europeans being non-indigenous.

^{xxiv} Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

^{xxv} Walter Mignolo, “Modernity and Decoloniality” In *Oxford Bibliographies*. Available at: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766581/obo-9780199766581-0017.xml>

^{xxvi} Walter Mignolo, "The de-colonial option and the meaning of identity IN politics." In *Anales*, vol. 9, no. 10. Instituto Ibero Americano, Universidad de Gotemburgo, 2007. Available at: https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/4500/2/anales_9-10_mignolo.pdf

^{xxvii} See Leanne Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love*, Available at <http://leannesimpson.ca/2013/10/25/islands-of-decolonial-love-songs-by-leanne-simpson-friends/>